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ABSTRACT

The benefits derived from an internship program within a college or university graduate education classroom are discussed, as well as the program's development and operation. Benefits from such a program are viewed as affecting both the institution and the interns themselves. The institution is provided with extra staff, along with their fresh experiences and outlooks, to take up slack in departmental projects and supply valuable up-to-date information. The intern gains first-time experience in the chosen career. Setting up an internship program is discussed including the basics of proposal writing. It is noted that the proposal should include why an internship is needed, who the interns will be working with, what they will be doing, and the compensation package involved. Intern selection is briefly outlined starting from candidate interviews and the use of placement services to making the offer. Finally, the operation of an internship program is described, involving acclimatizing the intern to the new physical environment and their eventual assimilation into the academic structure. (GLR)

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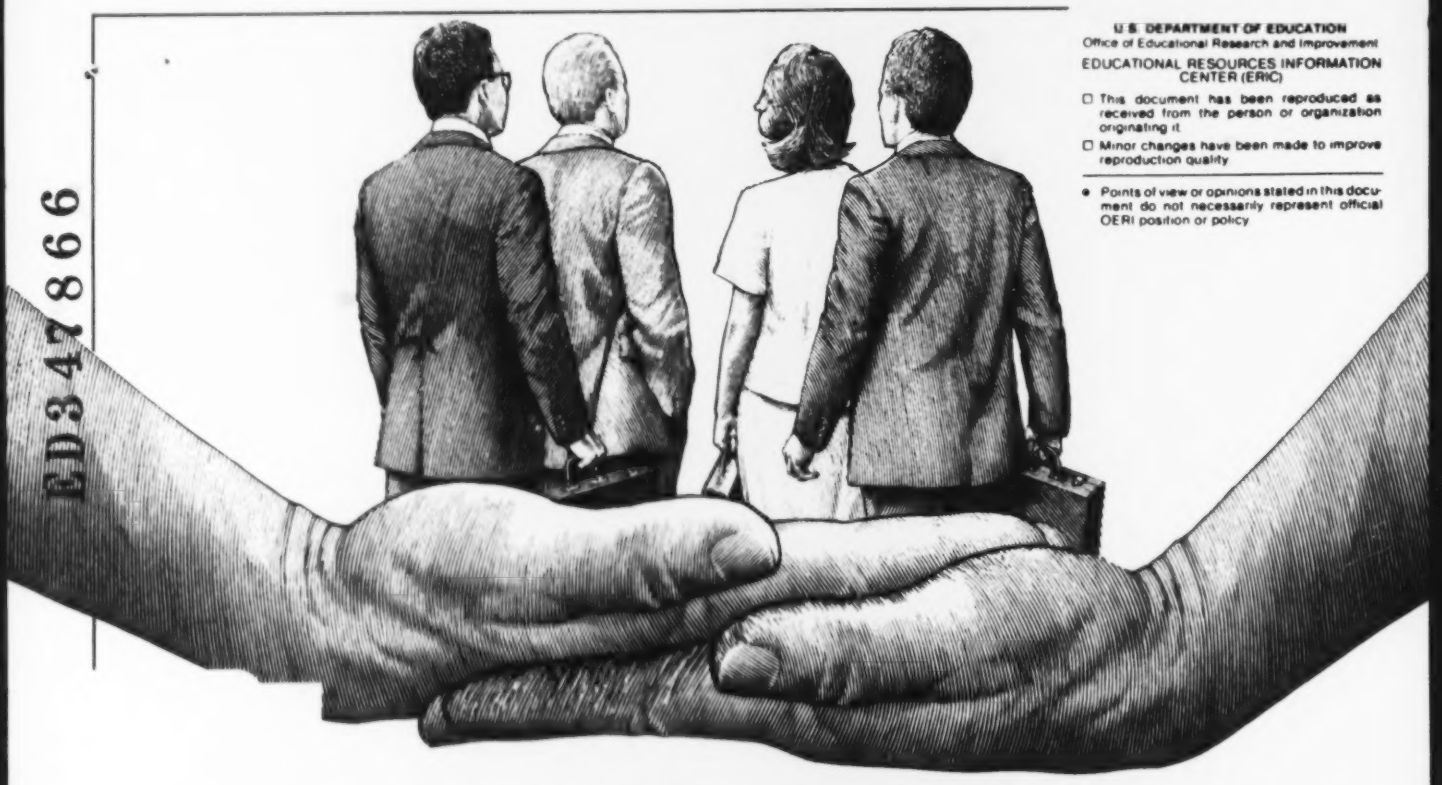

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Internships: Lending a hand

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Internships are mutually beneficial arrangements. In an intern, an institution receives an extra staff person, a fresh perspective, and access to the latest information being discussed in graduate education classrooms. The intern receives experience, a laboratory for applying classroom learning, and a support system for starting a career in student affairs.

Students usually schedule internships between their first and second years of graduate school for academic credit. For example, Western Illinois University requires students in its college student personnel program to complete a 360-hour, five-credit internship at a campus of their choice.

Benefits for the institution

An intern program benefits the institution in many ways. Interns bring a fresh outlook on the way things are done. Their experiences at other campuses and their knowledge in areas not necessarily represented by existing office staff make them excellent consultants. They enhance staff members' knowledge and improve existing programs.

For small departments, interns are the extra staff people who work on special projects that have been postponed because of the lack of time, personnel, or interest.

Interns also offer the institution addi-

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tional exposure to the latest information and theories discussed in the classroom. Although professionals attempt to stay current through reading journals, attending conferences, and engaging in stimulating discussions with colleagues, interns bring current topics and information from the cutting edge of education.

Benefits for the interns

Graduate students also benefit from internships. An internship is often a person's first chance to work full-time in the chosen career. The intern gains better understanding of the variety of projects and meetings that take place and discovers how projects fit within the mission of the office and institution.

The experience also involves interns in a variety of projects similar to ones they would be responsible for as professionals. An internship rounds out graduate students' education, exposing them to unique institutional projects and linking theory to practice.

Some graduate students use their internship as a trial run of their first job. They select an internship based on the type, size, and student population make-up they want to work in during their first professional position. They learn how to cope with new political structure in an unfamiliar community without an established support system. They begin to establish professional contacts in a new region of the country.

Setting up an internship

Internships are generally easy to establish. Depending on who in your institutional setting needs to support the internship programmatically and financially, you may have to write a proposal. If needed, this proposal should cover why interns are necessary, who they will be working with, and what they may be doing. It should also include desired compensation as well as a time frame for the experience. Remember, this proposal is just an outline, not the final form, of how the actual program will operate. For a summer internship, try to have the proposal approved by the end of January.

The next step is to secure the compensation package, which typically includes room, board, and a salary. The room and board may be acquired at little to no cost through the heads of the housing and food service departments. The salary can be either a flat stipend or an hourly rate. Flat stipends range from $1,000 to $4,000; however, the amount depends on what the institution can afford and what you feel the experience is worth. Don't let a shortage of funds stop you from offering an internship. You can augment the dollar value of a compensation package by including parking passes and complimentary cards for program board events, summer theater, or athletic and recreation centers. These cost little or nothing, yet they can help the interns a great deal.

In determining compensation, consider what types of projects and responsibilities you will assign to the intern. All staff members who will be working with the intern should generate a list of potential projects from which the intern can select a limited number of priority projects and several non-priority activities. Keep in mind that interns should not be the "mop-up" people who do all the unwanted projects from an entire year. If several areas contribute to the compensation, you must decide how to involve these areas in determining the intern's priorities. For example, residence life might want to require 10 hours work per week in exchange for providing a room. To ensure a well-rounded experience, the final list should include projects encompassing the full scope of the office.

Selecting interns

Probably the easiest method to link institutions with prospective interns is to use existing placement services like the ones set up by ACU-I or the Association of College and University Housing Officers. Many national conferences offer placement services for internships as well as professional opportunities. Listing an internship at a national conference permits the institution to interview many candidates. Another method of finding interns is to contact the heads of a graduate preparation program; one's alma mater is a good place to start.

After you have a pool of internship candidates, the selection process can be as simple as conducting phone interviews or as complex as visiting them at their campuses. Consider compatibility of interns to the staff, agreement on start and end times, and the compensation package. The list of non-priority projects can be negotiated either during the interview or when the intern arrives on campus.

Once you select an intern, make a formal offer over the phone or in writing. In addition, a simple contract outlining the dates of the internship, the projects to be completed, and the compensation to be given ensures that everyone understands exactly the terms of the internship.

Running an internship

Organize your intern orientation program. Tell other departments when interns will be starting as well as what their projects will be. This will make it easier for other staff mem-

bers to integrate the interns into the institution's established professional and social circles.

Make the interns' first day a light one. They should meet the people they will be working with directly and then tour the area to familiarize themselves with local services (i.e., grocery stores, laundries, gas stations, restaurants, etc.). Back on campus, the orientation process should include material about the institution, background on individual projects, information on how the department fits into the overall organizational structure, and plenty of time for questions and answers. The orientation process is ongoing and requires the supervisor to be accessible to the interns.

Give interns authority over the specific projects assigned to them so they can experience what it is like to make decisions, both good and bad. This ownership allows them to build their self-esteem and sense of accomplishment.

When establishing a calendar for the interns, schedule some "down time" between projects and activities. A supervisor needs to realize an intern spends much time processing information from various meetings and projects. During down time, the interns may share some insights not noticed by members of the permanent staff.

Include fun time in addition to down time to role model a healthy, balanced lifestyle. All too often, new professionals work 10 hours a day, six days a week, a schedule they learned to survive in school. This first full-time work experience is the ideal time to role model healthy work habits which prevent burnout.

The supervisor should also leave some time for interns to interview administrators from other departments and divisions. This experience teaches them about other areas within the institution they might consider working in at some time in the future.

Before the interns leave campus, get their feedback about the internship experience. Often, they suggest ways to improve the program. An intern's institution might require the supervisor to write a formal report evaluating the internship. The school offering the internship may also require a detailed account of the program to justify the expense. This information can be compiled into a report circulated to the departments who provided support for the internships. This contact will help them to realize how their support has helped the institution as a whole.

An internship program benefits not only the graduate student and the institution , but the entire field as well. A soon-to-be-released joint study by ACPA and NASPA on the state of graduate preparation programs reports that internships are one of the best ways institutions can take an active role in providing for the next generation of activities and union professionals. Former interns enter the profession with a broader scope of information and more experience, two appealing qualities for any job candidate.

Reference

The Recruitment, Preparation and Nurturing of the Student Affairs Professional. ACPA/ NASPA Joint Task Force on Professional Preparation and Practice. In press.

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